

Back from Desert Duty

By Doug Imberi, DDJC Public Affairs

As temperatures climbed to 130 degrees and the humidity of the Persian Gulf added much more discomfort, the 100-degree days in Tracy, CA, didn't seem too bad for Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, CA's (DDJC) reps on DLA's Contingency Operations in the Middle East.

"I was soaked all the time and drank water constantly," recalled Donny Hernandez, DDJC Bulk Packing Branch Chief. Hernandez made three trips to the DDC Forward Stocking Point in Bahrain. Dubbed DDZZ, the Forward Stocking Point on a little island off the coast of Kuwait carried strictly Class IV items consisting of construction and barrier supplies like lumber, cement, fencing and sandbags.

However, the hot temperatures didn't deter Transportation Specialist Fred Clary, Bin Material Handler Darrell Smith and Hernandez from volunteering for additional six month tours. Also representing DDJC on the DLA Contingency Operations team were MSG Menardo Nepomuceno, USA, and LTJG Matthew Kim, SC, USN.

The DDJC civilian members of the Contingency Operations team spent their tours at DDZZ. Each was multi-skilled and performed every distribution function required at a depot, including processing receipts, packing, transportation, inventory and radio frequency tag processing.

Seavans were trucked to DDZZ from the Bahrain port. Anywhere from 15 to 300 of the 20-foot vans would arrive daily. Normal inventory on hand numbered 2,500 to 3,000 seavans. Each seavan was loaded with a single commodity. "We had to open each one and inventory the contents," said Hernandez. Occasionally, a van had to be restacked.

MSG Nepomuceno and LTJG Kim's roles with the Contingency Operations was that of a customer service rep stationed in Baghdad, Balad and Kuwait. Their job was to track and expedite requisitions for the Warfighters. MSG Nepomuceno worked

primarily Class II-Property Book Items, Class III-Petroleum and Class IV-Construction and Barrier Material. One of MSG Nepomuceno's unusual challenges was expediting a shipment of special Seder meal kits for Jewish members of the coalition forces to observe the Passover. The first shipment couldn't be located and second needed special expediting to get there in time. MSG Nepomuceno's supply sergeant skills were indispensable in getting the meals distributed in time.

"DDJC has got to be the luckiest depot in DLA, to have a leader who turns things into gold by his touch," said LtCol Tim Abe, USMC, the DCST commander in Kuwait. "He also speaks Tagalog, which has been valuable for DLA's Contingency Operations because a large percentage of workers in Kuwait are from the Philippines."

While each Contingency Operations team member had several reasons for volunteering for the assignment in Bahrain, the number one reason was to support the Warfighter. "It was a very rewarding experience to be supporting soldiers on the front line," said Smith.

Among the secondary benefits was the professional development gained. "I know a lot more about container shipments," said Clary.

Most of Hernandez experience was in warehousing, but after spending a year at DDZZ he learned a lot about the transportation business. "Dealing with the customs was new to me," said Hernandez. "The laws are different over there."

Additionally, Clary pointed out the benefit for career enhancement and the opportunity to learn more about the Arab culture. "The Bahrainians were very cooperative, very nice and generous to us," said Clary.

They also all agreed that separation from their family was the toughest. For MSG Nepomuceno that meant being away from his wife and young

daughters ages three years and nine months. "My wife understands the importance of duty," said MSG Nepomuceno. "We did a lot of communicating by email," said Smith. "It was always good to hear from home."

For recreation they enjoyed visiting the huge public market. "It was kind of like our flea markets, but bigger," Hernandez described. "There were thousands of shops selling perfume, spices, textiles and gold. There must have been 400 gold shops alone."

Hernandez and Clary also enjoyed going pearl diving in the Persian Gulf. "We found pearls...the smallest pearls I ever saw, about the size of BBs," said Hernandez.

MSG Nepomuceno and Hernandez are currently on their next Contingency Operations deployment in Korea for 30 days to help with Ulchi Focus Lens a joint U.S. and Korean forces exercise. Also deployed from DDJC were Harry Tostado, a Distribution Facilities Specialist in the Bin Division, and Valerie Hall, a Reports Control Clerk for Installation Operations. Tostado just helped close DDZZ in Bahrain, while Hall is helped stand up the newest DDC depot in Kuwait.



DLA Contingency Operations team members from left to right: MSG Menardo Nepomuceno, Fred Clary, Darrell Smith, and Donnie Hernandez. Not pictured are LTJG Matthew, Harry Tostado, and Valerie Hall.